

ADDRESS

Delivered by

**J. E. McCOMB**

Grand Orator, on Occasion of

**LAVING OF CORNER STONE**

OF THE

**NEW CITY HALL OF GALVESTON.**

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## ADDRESS BY BRO. J. E. McCOMB

AT THE

Laying of the Corner Stone of the New City Hall,  
Galveston, April 22, 1888.

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THE Right Worshipful Grand Master, C. W. PRESTON then introduced the Grand Orator, BRO. J. E. McCOMB, who delivered the following Address :

MR. McCOMB said :—Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren, Ladies and Gentlemen :

A celebrated architect and builder concluded his instructions to the masters who were to conduct the work of rearing an important edifice with the significant charge: “Mark well my directions, and see that the corner-stone be properly laid; quit it not until you have thrice tried it by the square, the level and the plumb line.”

The corner-stone is the chief of the foundation which supports the entire superstructure, and is justly considered by operative Masons as the most important in the building.

As far back as history leads us we find the same importance attached to it.

With the ancients the corner-stones of all important edifices were laid with impressive ceremonies. Tacitus gives a graphic description of these ceremonies in the history of the rebuilding of the capitol of Rome, in which the magistrates, the priests, senators, Roman Knights and a large concourse of citizens joined, and all acting together made a grand and joyful demonstration.

This significant practice has been observed by all civilized communities, ancient and modern.

In the middle ages these ceremonies were usually conducted by societies such as the Building Corporations, the College of Artificers and the Society of Speculative Architects, etc., in which the most eminent men in the community and a large multitude of citizens usually participated.

In modern times Speculative Masons have been so often requested to conduct these ceremonies and give importance to the occasion that they have with great care and with reference to the customs and traditions of the past and the proprieties the present, provided an especial ritual to govern them in the performance of that duty. The relation which Freemasonry sustains to the moral, social and material development of our people and country is such that it is proper they should be invited and they should lend their assistance on such occasions. This suggestion leads us to consider some of

THE INFLUENCES OF ORGANIZED FREEMASONRY UPON PROGRESSIVE CIVILIZATION.

Operative Masonry has in all civilized communities ever been justly regarded as one of the grandest arts, engaged in the application of the rules and principles of architecture to the construction of edifices for private and public use, "houses for the dwelling place of men and temples for the worship of the Deity." Like every other art it abounds in technical terms and employs in practice an abundance of implements and materials which are peculiar to itself—without which we would be reduced to the tent of the Arab or the wigwam of the savage. Our temples of worship would be as those of the Druids and we, my brethren, would look for the "highest hills and lowest valleys." It has been truly said: "You may judge a community by its buildings—a nation by its temples."

Operative Masons have a history and a language. They have left their monuments all along the line of the march of progress, from ancient to modern times. By these we can trace them from the building of the Tabernacle and the first and second temples down to the building of the various cathedrals of St. Paul, Strasbourg and Cologne. These works progressed triumphantly under the mastership of such celebrated builders as Aholiab, Bezaleel and Hiram the Builder in the former and Sir Christopher Wren, Inigo Jones and Erwin Steinbach in the latter, and to-day history accords them honorable pages in the annals of the world's progress. They have been great factors in the struggle that has conducted us from the dark days of ignorance and superstition to the light and civilization of the nineteenth century.

Speculative Masonry is descended from operative masonry and has preserved the art. In 1854 England offered a prize of \$24,240 to anyone who would invent an order in architecture that would be entirely different from any one of the five taught in Freemasonry, viz—the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite of Greek and Roman origin. As yet we have heard of none one claiming the prize.

Speculative or Freemasonry has properly been defined to be the "scientific application and the religious consecration of the rules and principles, the language, the implements and materials of operative Masonry to the education of the intellect, the improvement in the moral and social virtues—the encouragement of the arts and sciences," and above all, "the veneration of Deity." As such it is a system of ethics, having its distinctive doctrines and philosophy.

Secret non-political organizations for the encouragement of the arts and sciences, and cultivation of the moral and social virtues have existed since dawning civilization shed its first rays upon man in an organized community. The Eleusinian mysteries were celebrated in the earliest days of Greece, and history and tradition inform us that in these were taught, "obedience to organized government, temperance, prudence, honesty, justice, love for fellow-man and reverence for the gods."

Cicero speaking of this organization said: "Among other advantages which we have derived from Athens this is the greatest, for it has greatly improved a rude and barbarous people, instructed us in the art of civilized life, and has not only taught us to live cheerfully, but to die in peace in the hope of a more happy future." They were Masons; they may have used a ritual different from ours, but they were "Masons at heart."

The secret societies of Rome contributed much toward the improvement of the arts and sciences, and the social and material development of the empire.

Hallam informs us that "a society called Masons, had retained many of the lost arts during the dark ages, especially that of architecture, and in a quiet and secret way had aided much in their restoration, as well as in restoring order, for their members were taught to respect the rights of others, to observe the golden rule and be law abiding citizens in the government in which they lived," and adds: "the origin of their ancient institution seems lost in the ruins of antiquity."

Amid the throes of revolution, the abolition of customs and the crumbling of empires, where nations have so completely disappeared that the very resemblance of their names is effaced their language lost, their glory vanished like a sound without an echo; the "LUX E TENEBRIS," the beacon light of our institution has peered out in the darkness, and the word of recognition has passed from "lip to ear," and the great principles which constitute the cornerstone, foundation, and pillars of our order, have had a perpetual existence in organized societies.

An enthusiastic traveler at the base of the pyramids of Egypt wrote: "While institutions, customs and kingdoms, which seemed based on foundations of the most solid stone, have been swept

away, these monuments stand grandly out and connect us with the past." Masonry has done more: it has not only survived the ravages of time, but as each war cloud has spent its fury it has shone brighter and brighter—has grown stronger and stronger—until to-day, in every civilized community, it has its springs of knowledge, where the humblest and greatest, in one united brotherhood, delight to drink at its fountains.

Masonic ethics do not stop with the moral, social and scientific, but also inculcate religious doctrines. "Not of sectarian theology," but simply self-evident tenets that stand out in bold relief and are easily comprehended—"a belief in God and the immortality of the soul," "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man"—yet it by no means proposes to usurp the offices or perform the functions of the church or the christian religion. It stands in perfect harmony with both.

While no partisan politics are known in the lodge, we inculcate obedience to law and fidelity to our country and government.

It is easy to perceive that such an institution must exert a wonderful influence in the social, moral and material development of a people.

These general results are produced by the influences exercised upon the individual members in the lectures and symbolic lessons of the order.

Masonry does not propose to make good men of bad men. The heart must be right. It proposes to make better men of good men.

The individual is taught in the first step that truth and wisdom exist and can only be obtained by diligent search and inquiry. The second step leads him to the temple of science; in the third he explores this beautiful field—he observes the metaphysical contention between good and evil, the right and the wrong, the true and the false. He is taught not to be deceived by external appearance, that "the stone which the builders rejected became the capstone in the temple."

He is taught to preside with distinction and forbearance over his fellow-men when called to a seat of honor. To deal honestly with his fellow men, take nothing but what is due—that imposition will be detected; that man can not live independently of his fellow-man; that when he least expects it he will need a friend, and that if his own selfishness has been such as to entitle him to no consideration his condition will indeed be hopeless.

He is taught to encourage education, promote the arts and sciences, and lend a helping hand in all that is calculated to benefit and ennoble mankind.

All of which is calculated to make men better citizens, better business men, better rulers, and better husbands for our ladies. An

active institution inculcating such grand principles is of priceless value to a community, aiding in its progressive development.

The celebrated Dr. Howard said that visiting an evil-disposed community had made him a convert to the idea of secret societies that would teach temperance, prudence, justice and the doctrine of "put a seal upon thy lips, speak not evil of thy brother or thy neighbor, and do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you."

All this Masonry teaches. This is the theory.

The good Samaritan was a Mason; doubtless he never attended a lodge, but he was a Mason at heart. Some of those fellows who passed by the man who had fallen among the thieves may have been far advanced in Masonic science and theory—in fact, I think one of them was a past grand lecturer; had so much theory he never found time to reduce it to practice. I agree with a learned doctor who said there would be several hundreds of millions more room in the world if all good theories were reduced to practice.

But as a body we can only inculcate the principles; the practice is an individual responsibility,

Turning to our own State we open its history and the history of Masonry in Texas, and the names of the same great master builders adorn the first pages of each.

Houston, Austin, Ingram, Jones, John A. Wharton, Rusk and others, who officiated in laying the corner-stone and aided in building the grand superstructure of our Empire State, were also the earliest patrons and promoters of Masonry in Texas.

Past Grand Master Mott thus refers to it in his address to the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Texas. His language will bear oft repeating :

" Eight years before Texas achieved her independence upon the battlefield of San Jacinto, Brothers Stephen F. Austin, the father of Texas; Ira Ingram, the first speaker of the congress of the republic of Texas; A. H. League, Ed. Mitchell, Joseph White and Thomas M. Duke met together at the little village of San Felipe, on the Brazos river, in the first Masonic convention ever held in Texas. To my mind," he adds, "the spectacle of Stephen F. Austin and his associates in the village of San Felipe, and John A. Wharton and his associates in the grove of trees back of the town of Brazoria, in 1835, seeking to give direction to the vital forces of Masonry and invoking its aid as a great lever of civilization, are sublime and impressive. Those noble men standing upon the confines of civilization seeking to establish an empire in the un-trodden wilds of Texas seemed to realize that Masonry was a necessary incident to the civilization of the Anglo-American. They invoked its beneficent teachings and humanizing influences in aid of their grand undertaking."

Thus the foundation of our order in Texas is contemporaneous with that of our great State—both laid by the hands of the same grand architects. They have transmitted both to us. What a grand and priceless heritage.

We look upon it and we are thrilled with hope and State pride; and the lines of Whittier come to us :

“ Behind the squaw’s light birch canoe”  
The steamer rocks and raves,  
And city lots are staked for sale  
Above old Indian graves.

“ We see the rush of pioneers,”  
Of nations yet to be,  
The first low wash of waves where soon  
Shall roll a human sea.

“ The rudiments of empire here ”  
Are plastic yet and warm,  
The chaos of a mighty world  
Is rounding into form.

Texas bound together by hallowed memories ! Texas bound together by the strongest ties ! Texas bound together by a four-fold cord that can not be broken !

My brethren and fellow-citizens, the spirit and mantle of our illustrious fathers should rest upon us.

Your steps should be firmly taken in the advance movement of progress. Lay your corner-stones and rear your magnificent super-structures.

Let this island city become a grand commercial entrepot for Texas. **GREAT TEXAS !** Texas undivided and indivisible, when in the near future her genial soil shall yield her corn of nourishment, wine of refreshment, and oil of joy to millions of industrious, prosperous and happy people.









